

Parsha **Pekudei** Drash 2024

by B. Laster

All of the Torah, and specifically these last parshiot that are about putting together the Mishkan and the officiants who have duties in the mishkan (according to David Goldston, who did the drash several weeks ago) have to do with other larger issues. So, what is Parsha Pekudei teaching us?

[From ***Nereh Or*** by Rabbi Hayley Goldstein and Lizzie Sivitz]:

First of all, the Mishkan is called by a new name this week: “Mishkan Haedet--Mishkan of Witness” –because at the beginning of the parsha there is an accounting of all of the gold, etc. Why did the Israelites need an accounting, a witness? The Sfat Emet explains that after the Golden Calf the Israelites did not believe they were worthy of closeness with God. The Mishkan, he says, acted as a witness to their true Goodness. It acted as a reminder to them and all of us to not “fall too low in our own eyes, for by TESHUVA we do return to ourselves and are restored to what we were before.” **Who or what can act as a witness for us, reminding us that we are good and deserving of closeness as we journey through this world?** We will come back to this essential question in our summary.

Pekudei describes the making of priestly garments worn in the Mishkan (Tabernacle)—the roles that we take on demand us to wear different hats: we may be sibling, professor, gardener, host, cook, or whatever. Understanding how our perspectives change as we take on different roles. In David Goldston’s drash, he spoke about the lesson of not losing ourselves in the roles that we have. So, one of the questions that we can discuss is how we set up boundaries and take on roles?

Pekudei, just as the parshiot for the last several weeks, is building a mishkan, a sacred space. The exact materials are specified and accounted for in this parsha. Our portions related to the Mishkan have a significant event of destruction BEFORE this building: The golden calf disrupts the people’s relationship with God. Moshe is not certain that God's presence will come back to the people. I want to propose that the re-building of the key God-People relationship happens through the **process** of the building of the Mishkan, through all of the people’s offerings. That is why there is so much repetition because the process is challenging, and specific, and skillful—just like a broken relationship takes time and skill to re-build. Last week Rachel talked about whether our Kavanah is there in what we bring. We are not to bring something that stretches us to the point of breaking (that burns us out); we each must give what's just the right amount and the right type of offering.

I recently learned from the Rabbi Helfand that Moshe was presented the mishkan in pieces, not put together whole. He, in fact, puts it together; and assembles it multiple

times over several days. He needs to learn how to construct this portable Tabernacle as they are about to embark on the long journey with it. This, also, reminds me of how relationship-building (either with the Eternal or with people around us) is an ongoing construction.

Many commentators, including Nechama Leibowitz, point out how repetition in the Beresheit creation story echoes in these five parshiot about the Mishkan. In Beresheit God created each of the six days, and it was good. To build the Mishkan, the community was asked to bring offerings, and they brought specific offerings of color and texture, and of types of materials and composition. They brought an abundance of offerings, and Bezalel and Olohiab created skillfully...and it was good. Moshe saw that it **was good and blessed the Mishkan**. Pekudai is the final parshiot, not only of the Book of Shemot but of the sequence of the building of the Mishkan. Here we get the finale--just as in creation stories--we see repetition used to build the narrative, to get to the finale. What is the finale in Beresheit? it is Shabbat; it is the gift of TIME; that is, God gives us Shabbat, so that we can maintain our relationship with God via time. In Pekudei, we witness the completion of human-made construction, the Mishkan. When the Mishkan is finished, the people come in close relationship with God. The cloud of God travels with the Mishkan in the midst of the people. It is the gift in SPACE.

Questions for discussion: What do you think about this cloud of the Mishkan? Moshe is “not able to” enter the mishkan when the Cloud-God presence-is there—Why do you think that is? What parallels do you see in the Creation story & the Mishkan story?

So, we see the parallels of creation and construction in the Mishkan narrative. What's different about the sequence? Here is that in between there's destruction or before creation, there's destruction, and that is embodied by the golden calf, which destroys the relationship of the people with God and it had to be rebuilt so when there is destruction, we must rebuild-- that is, we must do Tikkun Olam.

So, using the bridge of Tikkun Olam, I want to bring this parsha of Pekudei into relationship with the adjacent holiday of **Purim and the month of Adar**. On Purim, we read the Megillat Esther, and it invites us into joy, into celebration of the survival of our people. But, besides the relief and joy of survival, the book contains revenge on our enemies, violence, and death. How do we bridge the celebration with the destruction? And in our day, how do we read chapter 9 of the Megillah? How can we live with joy in the midst of a world with violence on and by the Jewish people?

One suggestion: As part of our Purim event we have Two central mitzvots. During Purim we are to 1. bring something sweet to our neighbors, Mishloah Manot, and 2. give gifts to those in need, Matanot laEvyonim. We always have Tzedakah options at our Purim events. As they say, “May we prepare our hearts for these mitzvot and do them willingly.”

We know that the story of Purim is not historical. The king in the story may be Xerxes I or II of around 480 BCE, but there are no texts or artifacts that support the rest of the narrative. So, let's consider it fiction, a novella, that can take different twists as we wish.

In the Persian society described in the Megillat Eshter, Jews are integrated within their thriving and very large society; it is a good place for them. Mordecai and Esther become leaders, but then in the middle we have destruction; we have anti-Semitism just as we have today and antisemitism tears apart not only society in general, but tears apart our people because we're distraught or mourning were disbelieving, but this could happen: we know! We think, though, that violence is not the answer That if we want to come back against antisemitism, we can't do what happens in chapter 9 of Megillat Esther. Yes, we must defend ourselves, but going beyond that, violence doesn't get rid of antisemitism. What is the answer to antisemitism? What is a different ending? Since chapter 10 is a very short chapter, somebody seems to have chopped off that part of the novella, so what came right there? Can you discuss what to fill in? What is the answer to antisemitism--by rooting it out in a long term way: changing people's thinking and perspectives? What is it that we can do that's constructive in the face of antisemitism? What can we add to the end of the Megillah that makes much more sense than what's currently there?

During this week, may we send healing prayers to all those in Israel and Gaza whose lives and sacred places have been affected by war. May both peoples find a way to rebuild their homes, their lives and their value cultures in the coming days. May we find ways to help them.

Questions for discussion:

1. **Who or what can act as a witness for us, reminding us that we are good and deserving of closeness as we journey through this world?**
2. **What do you think about this cloud in the presence of the Mishkan?**
 - a. **Why is Moshe “not able to” enter the mishkan when the Cloud-God presence-is there?**
 - b. **What parallels do you see in the Creation story and the Mishkan story?**
3. **What do you think about the finale of the offerings, robing of the priests, and assembling of the Mishkan?**
4. **What each of us can bring to use to overcome antisemitism?**
 - a. **How could a longer-term way to overcome antisemitism be added to Chapter 10 of the Megillah?**

Comment from Lisa Lang:

A wonderful meaty drash. thank you. I was struck by the tension between static and motion: the cloud and rules to define sacred space and the equally sacred

requirement for the community to move forward. Not so much about balance but about trust. Trust is not a given (despite the objects that define the mishkan being concrete) but must be renewed, and renewed robustly (cloud). your pts about relationships was very relevant.